

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

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Florida Department of Health in Okeechobee County Issues Hepatitis A Health Advisory – Encourages Vaccination

The Florida Department of Health reports several counties in the state of Florida are seeing an increase in the number of cases of Hepatitis A. Since 2018, 1293 cases have been reported statewide. Okeechobee has 4 confirmed cases since 2018 (2 cases in 2018 and 2 cases in 2019). Hepatitis A is a vaccine preventable communicable disease.

What is Hepatitis A?

Hepatitis A is a very contagious viral liver disease that is usually transmitted person to person primarily through the fecal-oral route (poop-mouth), which may include some types of sexual contact, poor handwashing hygiene after going to the bathroom or changing diapers, before food preparation and/or when handling objects such as intravenous needles. Hepatitis A can also be spread through food or water contaminated with fecal matter from persons with Hepatitis A. While most patients with Hepatitis A will fully recover, 80% of cases in Florida have required hospitalization.

How to prevent Hepatitis A?

The best way to prevent Hepatitis A infection is vaccination. Hepatitis A vaccines are safe and effective. Exercise good hygiene by handwashing with soap and running water after using the bathroom, changing diapers of children with diarrhea, and before preparing food. If experiencing the below symptoms, especially diarrhea, avoid preparing food for others.

What is the treatment for Hepatitis A?

Although there is no cure for Hepatitis A, it is a short-term illness. Seek immediate medical attention if you are experiencing symptoms of illness which include headache, fever, fatigue, sudden nausea, vomiting, diarrhea, abdominal pain, joint pain, dark urine, or jaundice. No specific therapy is available for Hepatitis A. Management of the illness includes treating the symptoms. Complications are rare but can occur and require seeing a doctor or hospitalization.

Health care providers are reminded to immediately report all cases of Hepatitis A to their local county health department to ensure a prompt public health response to prevent disease among close contacts.

Who should get vaccinated?

- All children at age 1 year
- Travelers to countries where Hepatitis A is common
- Families and caregivers of adoptees from countries where Hepatitis A is common
- Men who have sex with men (MSM)
- Persons who use recreational drugs (injection and non-injection)
- Persons experiencing homelessness
- Persons with chronic liver disease
- Persons with clotting-factor disorders
- Persons with direct contact with others who have Hepatitis A
- Anyone wishing to obtain immunity

The Florida Department of Health in Okeechobee County continues to target at-risk populations. Those who identify with these known risk factors or who wish to protect themselves through immunity can receive the Hepatitis A vaccine by visiting your primary healthcare provider. For free screening and vaccination contact the Florida Department of Health in Okeechobee County at (863) 462-5800.

About the Florida Department of Health

The department, nationally accredited by the [Public Health Accreditation Board](#), works to protect, promote and improve the health of all people in Florida through integrated state, county and community efforts.

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